



Studies suggest that rural poverty and homelessness is increasing more rapidly than in urban areas (First, Rife, and Toomey, 1994).



Rural Poverty: Homelessness

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of poverty and homelessness in rural communities in East Texas.

A critical review of existing literature on rural homelessness and personal communication from community professionals were synthesized to determine the characteristics of rural homelessness in general and how it impacts rural East Texas. Several dominant characteristics of rural poverty and homelessness found in literature and personal communication include: invisibility, isolation, and informal networks. Informal networks such as family, friends, and neighbors become the source of assistance in rural areas, thus further concealing the problem (First et al., 1994; Fitchen, 1992). Many rural communities lack homeless shelters, and due to the geographical design of rural areas, many homeless resort to sleeping in vehicles on country roads, living in wooded areas, camp grounds, or "couch surfing" from home to home (Commins, 2004).

Evidence clearly indicates that rural areas continue to be neglected in the areas of research and policy regarding poverty and homelessness (Fitchen, 1992). Consequently, this diminishes the funds allocated to rural areas (Commins, 2004). Furthermore, compared to urban cities rural homelessness is not typically associated with mental illness, but by a lack of funding and available resources (Fitchen, 1992).

From the findings, implications for social work practice, which involve utilizing community resources and advocating for social justice, were presented. Implications also include securing grants to transform abandoned Victorian homes into shelters, developing transitional housing, and mobilizing community professionals to provide pro bono counseling, psychiatric, dental and legal services.



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There is consensus in the literature that women, children, minorities, and veterans are most affected by rural homelessness (Katel, 2009).

